

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

September 9, 2013

Dear Colleague,

There is no greater question that is ever brought before Congress than the issue of whether to go to war.

The question before us presently is whether the United States should initiate war with Syria. In 1995, Colin Powell wrote, "War should be the politics of last resort. And when we go to war, we should have a purpose our people understand and support."

I do not believe Syria passes that test.

I treat the question of war as if it would determine the fate of my son or daughter. War is not some geopolitical chess game. It is, at best, a necessary evil. It should never be the first option. It should occur only when America is attacked or threatened, or when American interests are attacked or threatened. And only when all other options have been played out.

Too often, the debate begins and ends with an assertion that our national interest is at stake, but no evidence is ever presented to convince us of that assertion. The assertion itself is thought to be sufficient. I disagree. The burden of proof lies with those who wish to engage in war.

The resolution to authorize force in Syria goes too far, and also not far enough. It does too much, but also too little.

This resolution does too much by involving us in a civil war in which there is no clearly defined American national security interest. Even the State Department argues that there is no military solution here that is good for the Syrian people, and the best path forward is a political solution. I will not vote to send my son, your son, or anyone's daughter to fight for stalemate. The President must make the case for war. Thus far, he and his Administration have tried to make the case for "skirmish." They make the case for aseptic, surgical, see-no-blood, strikes that are pre-announced to not mean victory. The military strikes are pre-announced to be so limited as to provide no solution to the Syrian civil war.

The resolution does too little by narrowly circumscribing the President's power to execute war. I disagree strongly with unlimited executive power to initiate war. But I have some sympathy for the argument that once war commences, the executive should not be hamstrung by a narrowed ability to execute that war. If American interests are at stake, we shouldn't fight a war with one hand tied behind our back. Ronald Reagan's Secretary of Defense, Casper Weinberger, argued, "U.S. troops should only be committed

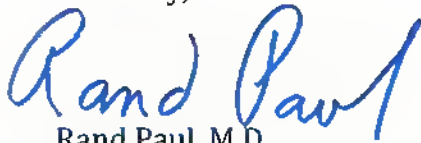
wholeheartedly and with the clear intention of winning. Otherwise, troops should not be committed.”

Those who wish to bring us into Syria’s civil war will argue that American national security is at risk, that Israel is at risk, that stability in the Middle East is at risk. A claim or a conclusion is not a debate. Certainly, there are national interests in the Middle East. Turkey is a NATO ally. Israel and Jordan are important allies. No one disputes this. Assad is clearly not an American ally. But will his ouster encourage stability in the Middle East, or further destabilize the region? Are the Islamic rebels our allies? Will they defend American interests? The President has no answer to any of these questions. The answers, so far as they are known, cast doubt on any clear-cut American allies – or interests – in the Syrian civil war.

Likewise, the case has not been made that a strike on Syria will not complicate relations with Iran and Russia, worsen the refugee crisis in Jordan, or increase attacks on Christians and other minority groups living in Syria. It has not been at all proven that an attack might actually encourage President Assad to use chemical weapons again.

For all these reasons, I write today to ask you to join me in opposing the resolution to involve the United States in Syria’s civil war.

In liberty,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Rand Paul". The signature is stylized, with the first name "Rand" and last name "Paul" clearly legible.

Rand Paul, M.D.
United States Senator